

The Russian Revolution

Note: Some teachers may choose to focus on Russia from the mid-19th century through the Revolution as a single thread. Therefore, this chapter first provides material also found in previous sections. It will serve as a good review of Russian history.

I. Review: Russia from 1815-1853

A. **Tsar Alexander I** (r. 1801-1825)

1. Alexander I initially favored some liberal ideals and Enlightened despotism (modeled after Napoleon)
 - a. In 1803, gave nobles permission to free their serfs but few nobles agreed to do so
 - Prussia had earlier freed their serfs leaving Russia as the only major country with serfdom
 - b. Created a more efficient regime from top to bottom.
2. After Napoleon's defeat in 1815, Alexander grew increasingly reactionary.
 - a. Russian nobles opposed any liberal reforms that threatened their influence
 - b. He saw the Russian Orthodox church as an instrument in keeping his subjects under control
 - c. Liberals were watched closely in universities and schools
 - d. Traveling abroad to study was prohibited
3. He proposed the "**Holy Alliance**" after the Congress of Vienna
 - a. First major post-Napoleon attempt to stop growth of liberalism
 - b. Proposed for all monarchs to sign a statement agreeing to uphold Christian principles of charity and peace
 - c. Plan proved to be overly ideological and impractical and few took it seriously
 - d. Liberals saw it as a sort of unholy alliance of monarchies against liberty and progress.

B. Russia: **Decembrist Uprising** (1825)

1. Alexander's death led to a power struggle.
 - a. His brother, Constantine, was supported by liberal nobles but Constantine did not want the throne.
 - b. Younger brother, Nicholas, was next in line to the throne and was supported by conservatives

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2. **Decembrists** (junior military officers): liberal upper-class opponents of the autocratic Russian system of gov't supported popular grievances among Russian society.
 - a. First upper-class revolt against Russia's autocratic system of government
 - b. Sought to prevent Nicholas I's assumption of the throne
 - c. Revolt eventually suppressed by Nicholas I and Decembrist leaders were executed

C. **Nicholas I** (1825-1855)

1. Nicholas became Europe's most reactionary monarch
 - a. Relied mostly on political advice from military leaders.
 - b. Believed in "divine right" of kings
 - c. Sought to prevent western ideas from penetrating Russia
 - d. The principles of **autocracy, orthodoxy and nationality** became the foundation of the state
 - e. The Revolutions of 1830 and especially 1848 convinced Nicholas that suppressing liberalism was crucial to maintaining order.
2. Russia became a police state with censorship, a secret police (the "Third Section"), and state-sponsored terrorism
 - a. No representative assemblies.
 - b. Education was limited and university curricula were carefully monitored.
 - c. Though Nicholas (like Alexander I) believed serfdom was inefficient, he believed trying to change it would only stir up rebellion
 - d. Autocracy resulted in the severe alienation of Russian intellectuals
 - Many western books, however, were smuggled into Russia
3. Intellectuals developed two opposing camps in this period:
 - a. **Slavophiles** believed that the culture of the Russian village (the *mir*) was superior to that of the West.
 - Saw the *mir* as a foundation for a future socialist society
 - Opposed to autocracy but supported the tsar
 - Favored the dominance of the Orthodox Church on society
 - Suspicious of corruptive bourgeoisie influence as in France and Britain

- b. **Westernizers** wanted to extend the “genius of Russian culture” by industrializing and setting up a constitutional gov’t
 - Sought an end to serfdom
 - Due to a lack of parliamentarism in Russia they believed that revolution was the key to change

II. **Russia** during the “Age of Mass Politics”

A. Defeat in Crimean War (1853-56) marked a turning point in Russian history by fostering modernization

1. Russia realized it had to modernize or it would remain vulnerable militarily and economically
 - a. The Russian army was largely composed of uneducated & unskilled serfs who performed poorly on the battlefield
 - b. Freeing the serfs now seemed necessary for military and economic modernization
2. Russia lacked a sizeable middle class that promoted liberalism economically, politically and socially.
 - a. This was a key difference for why Russia lagged behind western and central Europe (e.g. Britain, France and Germany)
 - b. The nobility (who controlled the serfs) were not a force for modernization and reform

B. **Alexander II** (r. 1855-1881)

1. Perhaps the greatest reform-minded czar since Peter the Great
 - a. Most liberal ruler in Russian history prior to 20th century.
 - b. Yet, Russia still remained largely autocratic during his reign
2. Alexander believed serfdom had retarded Russia’s modernization: agriculture had been poor for centuries
 - a. 90% of Russian people worked in agriculture
 - b. Serfs could be bought or sold with or without land in early 19th century
 - c. Nobles enjoyed an unlimited source of labor from serfdom and thus were not motivated to improve agricultural production.
 - d. Serfdom had led to over 1,500 peasant uprisings during the first half of the 19th century
 - Alexander sought to convince nobles that if serfdom were not abolished peasants would take matters into their own hands against the nobles.

- e. Serfs could be conscripted into the army for 25 years.
 - Few survived their term of service
 - Wives of conscripts could actually remarry 3 years after husbands began their military service
- 3. **Emancipation Act** (or Emancipation Edict), 1861
 - a. Abolished serfdom
 - Peasants no longer dependent on the lord
 - Free to move and change occupations
 - Could enter contracts and own property
 - b. Land was given to serfs via the *mirs*.
 - c. Nobles were compensated by the state for land given to serfs
 - Serfs had to pay gradually back the state over a period of about 50 years.
 - d. Yet, most Russians not significantly impacted by the Emancipation Edict
 - **Mirs:** most Russians lived in communes which were highly regulated and that organized payments to the state for land lost to nobles
 - Collective ownership and responsibility made it difficult for individual peasants to improve agricultural methods or leave their villages
 - e. Many serfs migrated to cities, despite restrictions on leaving the *mirs*
- 4. **Zemstvos** established in 1864 by Alexander's decree: district or village assemblies that administered local areas
 - a. Significant step towards popular participation where peasants would elect representatives
 - b. Yet, in reality noble lords controlled the *Zemstvos* and thus had more influence than towns and peasant villages
- 5. Other reforms
 - a. Judicial system improved
 - Modeled on British system; separate judicial branch
 - Public trials by jury
 - Yet, czar could overturn court decisions and political cases were often transferred to a secret court martial
 - b. Term of military service reduced from 25 to 6 years
 - c. Brutal corporal punishment was eased
 - d. Censorship was relaxed during his early years but eventually reinstated
 - e. Education liberalized

6. Industrialization in Russia was stimulated by railroad construction
 - a. Russia had fallen behind major industrialized nations in Western & Central Europe
 - b. Russia needed better railroads, better armaments and reorganization of the army
 - c. Between 1860 and 1880 railroad mileage grew from 1,250 to 15,500
 - d. Railroads enabled Russia to export grain and earn profits for further industrialization
 - e. Stimulated domestic manufacturing: industrial suburbs grew up around Moscow and St. Petersburg, and a class of modern factory workers began to emerge
 - f. Strengthened Russia's military giving rise to territorial expansion to the south and east
 7. Critics of Alexander II late in his reign
 - a. Alexander increasingly became more conservative and autocratic
 - b. **Anarchists**, led by **Mikhail Bakunin**, believed the state should be destroyed altogether
 - c. Nihilism: intellectuals who believed in nothing but science and that the social order should be completely wiped out and built up from scratch.
 - d. In response to nihilism, a radical populist movement emerged that sought a utopian agrarian order—shared Slavophile beliefs
 8. Alexander II assassinated in 1881 by radicals who bombed his carriage in St. Petersburg
- C. **Alexander III** (r. 1881-1894)
1. Became most reactionary czar of the 19th century:
 - a. Sought to rule Russia through "**Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Russification** (nationalism)"
 - Zemstvos influence reduced and judicial power shifted to the police and military courts.
 - States grip on higher education was tightened
 - Russian Orthodox Church persecuted other religious groups (that constituted about 1/3 the empire's population)
 - Encouraged anti-semitism: **pogroms** resulted in severe persecution of Jews (many emigrated)
 - **Theodore Herzl: zionism** -- advocated a Jewish homeland in the Holy Land as a remedy to continued persecution of Jews in eastern and central Europe

- Languages other than Russian were banned (although Russians accounted for only 40% of the empire's population).

D. **Count S. Y. Witte** oversaw Russian industrialization in the 1890s

1. Aggressively courted western capital & advanced technology to build great factories
2. Resulted in rise of a small Russian middle-class
3. Gov't built state-owned railroads doubled to 35,000 miles by 1900
 - Construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway helped to modernize Russia; connected Moscow with Vladivostok—5,000 miles
4. Russia put on the gold standard to strengthen the government's finances
5. By 1900, Russia 4th in steel production (behind U.S., Germany & Britain)
6. By 1900, Russia exported half the world's refined petroleum
7. As in western Europe, industrialization in Russia contributed to the spread of Marxist thought and the transformation of the Russian revolutionary movement after 1890 (as industrial workers felt exploited)

E. Despite economic and social reforms, Russia's economic problems were still profound by 1900

1. 1/3 of Russian farmland not used; food could not keep pace with increasing population
 - Russia had become the most populous nation in Europe by the late-nineteenth century
2. Depression of 1899 wiped out gains since 1890 resulting in tremendous unemployment
3. 60% of the population was illiterate, although literacy was growing in urban areas like Moscow and St. Petersburg
4. Russia's plight was aggravated by Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05

F. **Nicholas II** (r. 1894-1917)

1. **Russo-Japanese War** (1904-1905)

- a. Russians had established a sphere of influence in Manchuria and now sought Korea (which had just been acquired by Japan in the Sino-Japanese War)
 - Sought a railroad through Manchuria to Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean
- b. Russian fleet was destroyed by Japan in 1904 and Russian losses were heavy at the bloody land battle at Mukden
- c. **Treaty of Portsmouth** (1905)
 - Russia accepted Japanese control of Korea, concessions to Japan in Manchuria, and half of Sakhalin island
- d. The Russian government now turned its attention away from east Asia and focused instead on expanding Russian control in the Balkans
- e. Russia's dismal showing in the war became a major cause of the Revolution of 1905.
 - Many Russians were angry that soldiers were dying in a far away location for a losing cause

2. **Revolution of 1905**

- a. Liberalism had gradually grown in certain segments of the Russian population over the previous 50 years.
 - A professional middle class emerged due to increased educational opportunities, increased gov't jobs, and industrial development.
 - Liberals also included some nobles and some leaders of the *Zemstvos*
 - Poor economy and strains of war led peasants, the growing urban proletariat and the middle class to demand reforms.
 - Some reforms included reduction of the work day (1897) and a factory insurance law (1903).
- b. **"Bloody Sunday"**, Jan. 1905: 200,000 workers & peasants marched peacefully to the "Winter Palace" asking the tsar for reforms.
 - Czar was not in town.
 - Army fired on marchers in cold blood, killing about 300 and wounding an additional 1,000

- c. A general strike, peasant revolts and troop mutinies paralyzed Russia by October and Nicholas was forced to make concessions.
 - One of the largest concessions was the creation of a national parliament—the Duma.
 - Serfs no longer had to make payments to the state for lands received due to emancipation
 - Poles and Lithuanians were allowed to once again use their own languages
 - Religious toleration allowed in Poland.
 - Political trials were returned to regular courts
 - Some restrictions on Jews were abolished
- d. The **October Manifesto** of 1905 created the Duma
 - The Duma met for the first time in spring 1906
 - The majority consisted of Constitutional Democrats (Kadets) who were committed liberals
 - The Duma was a national assembly that would serve as an advisory body to the tsar
 - Representatives elected by universal male suffrage
 - Granted freedom of speech, assembly and press
 - Tsar retained absolute veto
 - Revolutionaries were divided, however, resulting in Duma having no real influence
 - Propertied classes benefited at expense of workers, peasants and national minorities
- e. Nicholas eventually dissolved the Duma twice in 1906
 - Some Kadets sought to reduce the power of the tsar, give certain noble lands to peasants and make government officials answerable to the Duma
 - Many liberals and middle-class professionals continued to urge reform
 - A third Duma was created in 1907 that was more conservative and sympathetic to the tsar.
- f. Repression was used successfully by the regime to weaken political opponents or sympathetic critics of the regime
 - Government-sponsored violence occurred in Latvia and Estonia in 1906 resulting in over 1,000 deaths.

- Jews were once again savagely persecuted
 - German, Russian and Polish property owners were attacked
 - Almost 1,000 alleged political opponents were executed due to sentences by military courts in 1906-07.
3. Russia experienced mild economic recovery between 1907 and 1914
 - a. **Peter Stolypin**: new prime minister who pushed through important agrarian reforms to break down collective village ownership of land and encourage the more enterprising peasants (kulaks)
 - Much land was transferred from communes to private owners.
 - b. Stolypin assassinated in 1911 (perhaps at the request of nobles who saw him as too liberal)
 - c. Between 1911 & 1914 many industrial strikes and peasant violence occurred as dissatisfaction with the tsar's regime grew.
 4. Russia's poor showing in World War I directly led to the Russian Revolution

III. Rise of socialism in Russia

- A. 1898--Social Democratic Worker's party founded in Minsk with **Vladimir Lenin** as leader; Lenin eventually exiled to Switzerland
 1. Lenin became the heir to Marx in socialist thought
 2. Three basic ideas central to Lenin's philosophy:
 - a. Capitalism could be destroyed only by violent revolution; he denounced revisionism
 - b. Socialist revolution was possible under certain conditions, even in relatively backward Russia.
 - Peasants were poor and thus potential revolutionaries.
 - c. Necessity of a highly disciplined workers' party, strictly controlled by a dedicated elite of intellectuals and full-time revolutionaries
 - This constituted a major difference with Marx who believed in a revolution controlled by the workers.
- B. 1903, Social Democrats (Social Democratic Worker's Party) split into two factions
 1. **Mensheviks** (the "minority"): Wanted to await the evolution of capitalism and the proletariat; sought a more democratic party with mass membership.

2. **Bolsheviks** (the "majority"): Followed Lenin's ideas

- C. In light of the 1905 Revolution ("Bloody Sunday") the Bolsheviks in exile planned a revolution
1. Lenin and **Leon Trotsky** formed workers' Soviets (councils of workers, soldiers and intellectuals)
 2. Influence of Socialists, soldiers Soviets, & other parties and soldiers' increased before WWI

IV. The **February Revolution**, 1917

A. Causes for the overthrow of Nicholas II

1. Russia's poor showing in the Russo-Japanese War earlier had damaged the regime's credibility and had led to some reforms in 1905.
2. After 1905, widespread discontent with the regime continued due to the lack of significant reforms after the Revolution of 1905.
3. Most important cause: the tremendous human and economic toll on Russia during World War I was the most important factor leading to the revolution
 - a. Massive military casualties and food shortages
 - b. The tsar's leadership during the war was increasingly seen as incompetent
 - c. While the tsar was off fighting the war, the tsar's widely hated wife—Tsarina Alexandra—and court was unduly influenced by the notorious **Rasputin**
 - The tsarina believed Rasputin had mystically saved her son (and heir to the throne), Alexei, from death due to hemophilia
 - Russia's gov't ministers were increasingly frustrated by Rasputin's hold on the royal family
 - Noble conspirators eventually killed him

B. The Revolution was centered in St. Petersburg (Petrograd)

1. Revolution was started by massive strikes in January and February, largely caused by food shortages.
 - a. Notably, women rioted for bread in Petrograd and were supported by workers and soldiers
 - b. Demonstrators demanded the overthrow of the tsar and the creation of a provisional government.
 - c. Thousands of soldiers, who had been ordered to suppress the strikes, now gave the support to the revolution

2. Nicholas II abdicated his throne on March 2
 - a. The royal family was placed under house arrest
 - b. Only about 1,000 Russians had died in the revolution
3. The Duma responded by declaring a provisional gov't on March 12, 1917.

C. The **Provisional Government**

1. A dual government, in effect, ruled Russia
 - a. The Provisional Gov't consisted of Constitutional Democrats and liberals, many of whom wanted to continue the war
 - b. **Petrograd Soviet** consisted of workers and soldiers who had overthrown the tsar (soldiers now controlled the army)
 - **Mensheviks** led its organization
 - The Soviet accepted authority of the Provisional Government seeing it as the best chance for maintaining control of the country
 - Soon, the Soviet brought together representatives from other soviets and emerged as a national body.
 - Popular pressure demanded more radical reforms
2. **Alexander Kerensky** became leader of the Provisional Gov't (while remaining a member of the Soviet)
 - a. Participation of Kerensky and other socialists in the new coalition government gave the Provisional Government more legitimacy
 - No longer was the gov't an exclusively bourgeois institution
 - Sought peace in the war without losing land to the Central Powers
 - b. Implemented liberal program
 - Equality before the law
 - Freedom of religion, speech, and assembly
 - Right of unions to organize & strike
 - Amnesty of political prisoners
 - Election of local officials
 - 8-hr work day
 - c. Kerensky rejected outright social revolution
 - Didn't want to immediately confiscate large landholdings and give them to peasants

3. **Army Order #1** (March 1, 1917)
 - a. Issued by the Petrograd Soviet seeking to replace military officers loyal to the tsar and place the Soviet in firm control of the army
 - b. Stripped officers of their authority and placed power in the hands of elected committees of common soldiers
 - Soldiers feared that in the future they might be liable for treason against the tsar
 - c. Led to collapse of army discipline
 - d. The Allies recognized the Provisional Government hoping it would continue the war on the Eastern Front.
4. Anarchy effectively plagued Russia by summer of 1917
 - a. Numerous nationalities and local governments took matters into their own hands
 - b. Russian peasants (like what had occurred in France during the Great Fear of 1789) began to take lands from the lords, often violently
 - By 1920, the number of landless peasants had decreased by half.

V. **October Revolution** resulted in a **communist** dictatorship

A. Rise of **Vladimir I. Lenin**

1. Germany arranged for Lenin to be transported back to Russia in a sealed railroad car in April, 1917
 - Hoped to get Russia out of the war by fomenting a more radical revolution that demanded peace
2. **"April Theses"** (1917): Lenin rejected all cooperation with the "bourgeois" provisional government
 - a. Called for a "Socialist revolution" and establishment of a Soviet republic
 - b. Nationalization of banks and landed estates
 - c. **"All Power to the Soviets"; "All Land to the Peasants"; "Stop the War Now"**
3. Lenin believed that a communist revolution could occur, even in an industrially backward country such as Russia.
 - However, breaking with Marx, Lenin believed that a small professional revolutionary elite would have to force the issue.
4. The Provisional Gov't sought to repress the Bolsheviks but were largely ineffective
 - Lenin forced to flee to Finland but continued issuing directives to Bolsheviks while in exile
5. The Bolsheviks gained a slim majority in the Petrograd Soviet by the summer of 1917

- B. Fall of the Provisional Government
1. **Kornilov Affair** (August 1917)
 - a. Conservatives plotted an overthrow of Kerensky's government
 - Dissatisfied with Kerensky's handling of the war, inability to suppress Bolsheviks, and peasant seizures of land
 - b. The plot eventually failed without bloodshed
 - c. However, Kerensky lost all credit with the army
 - d. Fear of a right-wing counter-revolution played into the Bolsheviks' hands as they were able to cast themselves as the defenders of the revolution
 4. Kerensky's refusal to end the war and prevent anarchy led to fall of Provisional Gov't
- C. **Politburo** formed to organize the revolution: included Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin
- D. October 25, **Leon Trotsky**, leader of the Petrograd Soviet (the **Red Army**), led the Soviet overthrow and arrest of the provisional gov't
1. Trotsky was the second most important figure in the October Revolution
 2. The Provisional Government collapsed with relatively little bloodshed (compared to the February Revolution)
 3. October 26, the Bolsheviks, who controlled the Central Committee of the Congress of Soviets, officially took control of the government.
- E. Opponents of the Bolsheviks were arrested, including many Mensheviks
1. **Cheka**, the secret police, created in December to eliminate opponents
 - Became a much feared organization with virtually absolute power
 2. New elections for the Constituent Assembly
 - a. Lenin's campaign: "**Peace, Land, Bread**"
 - b. Bolsheviks lost (only 29% of vote) but overthrew new gov't in January 1918 with the Red Army
 3. Bolsheviks soon thereafter were renamed the **Communist Party**
 4. The surprising result of the revolution was not that the Bolsheviks took power but *maintained* power, even though they were a small minority

F. Lenin's reforms

1. Lenin gave land to peasants (although peasants already had taken it, much like the "Great Fear" of the French Revolution)
 - This move was shrewd in that Lenin had no real control over lands in the countryside but was now perceived as a friend of the peasantry
2. Lenin gave direct control of individual factories by local workers' committees.
3. **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** in March 1918 took Russia out of WWI
 - a. It was clear to Lenin that Russia had lost the war to Germany
 - Prolonging the war would continue adding to Russia's misery
 - He was willing to achieve peace at any price
 - Many Bolsheviks disagreed with Lenin initially but Russia's poor showing in early 1918 convinced them to support peace
 - b. Provisions
 - Russia lost 1/3 of its population and 25% of its land
 - Lost territories included the Baltic states, Poland, Ukraine and Finland
 - c. Germany's defeat by the Allies in November nullified the treaty
4. Lenin moved the gov't from Petrograd to Moscow
5. Trotsky reorganized the army
6. These actions resulted in much opposition to the Bolsheviks and ultimately the Russian Civil War

VI. **Russian Civil War** (1918-1920)

- A. **"Reds"** (Bolsheviks) vs. **"Whites"** (included officers of old army, and 18 groups proclaiming themselves the real gov't of Russia—had no leader to unify them)
1. Many peasants feared the Whites and thus supported the Reds
 2. Both sides proved to be extremely brutal
 3. Over 2 million people left Russia due to the revolution and the civil war
- B. Allies sent troops to help "Whites," hoping to get Russia back into the war
1. Archangel Expedition in Murmansk sought to keep military supplies from falling into German hands
 - U.S. contributed about 5,000 troops
 2. Allies also sent troops into Siberia to save thousands of marooned Czech troops, prevent Bolsheviks from

- gaining supplies and prevent Japan from taking control of Siberia
 - 3. The Russian communists never forgot the fact they had been invaded by the U.S. and the Allies
- C. **"War Communism"**: Bolsheviks mobilized the home front for the civil war
- 1. Earliest form of socialism in the Soviet Union
 - 2. Applied a "total war" concept to the civil war
 - 3. Declared that all land was nationalized
 - 4. State took control of heavy industries and ended private trade
 - Resulted in huge decline in production
 - 5. Forced peasants to deliver food to towns
 - 6. **Cheka** (secret police) hunted down and executed thousands of opponents, such as the tsar and his family and other enemies of the proletariat
- D. By 1921, the Reds were victorious
- 1. Communists extremely well organized and highly disciplined
 - The Red Army prevailed under Trotsky's leadership
 - 2. Whites were divided and poorly organized
 - 3. The **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)** was created in 1922
- E. Results of the Russian Revolution:
- 1. Costs: 15 million dead, economy ruined, international trade gone, millions of workers fled the country
 - 2. Creation of world's first communist society: one of the monumental events of 20th century

Terms to Know

Czar Alexander I	Vladimir Lenin
"Holy Alliance"	Mensheviks
Decembrist Uprising	Bolsheviks
Nicholas I	Leon Trotsky
Slavophiles	February Revolution
Westernizers	Rasputin
Alexander II	Provisional Government
Emancipation Act, 1861	Alexander Kerensky
<i>mir</i>	Petrograd Soviet
<i>zemstvos</i>	Army Order No. 1
anarchy	April Theses
Mikhail Bakunin	Kornilov Affair
Alexander III	October Revolution
"Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Russification"	Politburo
pogroms	Red Army
Theodore Herzl, zionism	Cheka
Count S. Y. Witte	Communist Party
Nicholas II	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 1918
Russo-Japanese War	Russian Civil War
Treaty of Portsmouth	Reds
"Bloody Sunday"	Whites
Revolution of 1905	"war communism"
October Manifesto	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Duma	(USSR)
Peter Stolypin	

Essay Questions

Note: This sub-unit is a moderate probability area for the AP exam. In the past 10 years, 6 questions have come wholly or in part from the material in this chapter. Below are some practice questions that will help you study the topics that have appeared on previous exams or may appear on future exams.

1. Why did liberalism not take root in Russia between 1815 and 1917 when it played a major role in western and central Europe?
2. Analyze the major causes of the Russian Revolution.
3. Why did the Bolsheviks, who were a small minority, ultimately succeed in acquiring and maintaining power?

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